

REMARKS

Claims 16-25 are presented for examination. Claims 16-18, 20, 22 and 24 have been amended to define still more clearly what Applicants regard as their invention. Claims 16-18, 20, 22 and 24 are in independent form.

It is believed that those claims and the dependent claims depending therefrom are patentable over the art relied on by the Examiner in the June 30, 2003 Office Action, because that art is not seen to teach or suggest the methods recited in those claims.

Applicants acknowledge with thanks the courtesies extended by the newly assigned Examiner in this application, during the April 8, 2004, Interview, during which Applicant's representative explained how the pending claims distinguish over the prior art. In particular, Applicants' representative explained that those claims are patentable at least because none of the prior art teaches or suggests introducing including a gas containing carbon while exhausting an sealed atmosphere formed by a chamber.

During the Interview, the Examiner raised a question regarding the language "within an atmosphere containing carbon" of the claims, inquiring specifically as to whether carbon pre-exists within the atmosphere prior to the step of introducing the gas containing carbon, or whether the carbon is placed within the atmosphere only as a result of the introducing step. Applicants confirm that the carbon is placed within the atmosphere as a result of the introducing step. Applicants have deleted the phrase "within an atmosphere containing carbon" from each of the independent claims, to eliminate any possible ambiguity as to this point.

During the Interview, the Examiner also inquired as to where the Specification provides support for introducing a gas containing carbon into a sealed atmosphere while exhausting the sealed atmosphere. In response, Applicants respectfully point to page 89, lines 5-20, of the originally filed Specification, which reads as follows:

Next, the gate valve 304 was closed while the gate valve 303 was opened to the exhaust the inside of the enclosure and the vacuum chambers 301 and 302 using the evacuation apparatus. Then, the slow leak (needle) valve was opened to introduce benzonitrile into the enclosure. The benzonitrile was retained in an ampoule, and benzonitrile gas evaporated from the ampoule was introduced into the vacuum chamber 301 via the water adsorbing chamber and the slow leak (needle) valve and then flowed to the enclosure and the chamber 302.

The opening of the slow leak (needle) valve was adjusted to maintain the benzonitrile introduction amount constant. The pressure in the vacuum chamber 301 was about 5.0×10^{-3} Pa, and the pressure in the vacuum chamber 302 was 8.0×10^{-4} Pa.

As can be seen, this passage teaches closing valve 304 and opening valve 303 to exhaust the vacuum chambers 301 and 302, and opening the needle valve to introduce benzonitrile (which contains carbon), so that the two actions occur at the same time.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, a Notice of Allowance is earnestly solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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